

- The Mercy Seat was also where the atoning sacrifice was offered on the Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement, there were a series of sacrifices made - a bull for the sin of the high priest and a goat for the sin of the people (Lev 16:11-17). The high priest would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat as well as in front of it. And in that way, he made atonement for his own sin and then the sin of the people. The mercy seat was the place where atonement took place. God's wrath against Israel was averted by the sprinkling of the blood of an innocent substitute on that mercy seat.
- The Mercy Seat in the New Testament. The mercy seat, using the Greek word "*hilastērion*," is mentioned 2X in the NT.
  - In Hebrews 9:1-9, the author describes the arrangement of the furnishings of the Tabernacle and the mercy seat, or, atonement cover (v5). The author also describes the annual activity of the high priest offering the blood of the atonement sacrifices. The rest of Hebrews 9 & 10 describe how Christ came as a better high priest, serving in the heavenly tabernacle and offering a superior sacrifice of atonement (9:11-12) - to show that what Leviticus 16 described was only looking forward to the more perfect sacrifice that Jesus would make on our behalf.
  - The second time "*hilastērion*" is used is in Romans 3:25. Here it is translated as "mercy seat" (Christian Standard Bible, Young's Literal Translation), or "propitiation" (KJV, ESV, NASB), or "sacrifice of atonement" (NIV, NRSV).
    - YLT: *Whom God did set forth a mercy seat, through the faith in his blood, for the shewing forth of His righteousness, because of the passing over of the bygone sins in the forbearance of God.*
    - CSB: *God presented him as the mercy seat by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed.*
- God presents Christ as the means of making atonement.
  - "*Hilastērion*" or the mercy seat can refer to the place of atonement. The mercy seat in the OT was God's dwelling place among His people, and that is really a good description of Jesus as well. Jesus Christ is the "mercy seat." Jesus Christ is God's meeting place (1 Tim 2:5).
  - In a very real way, Jesus was the fulfilment of what the OT mercy seat was pointing toward. Not only was Christ the Mercy Seat, Jesus was Himself the perfect sacrifice that was superior to the animals offered by the high priests under the old covenant (Heb 9:12). Jesus fulfilled all aspects of the OT sacrifice of atonement. He was the high priest, the atoning sacrifice, and the mercy seat. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus declared that He was the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets. All the OT points to Jesus and finds its ultimate meaning and fulfilment in Him. And this is dramatically illustrated by the OT mercy seat pointing ahead to Jesus and His atoning sacrifice.

## The Way of Salvation - Justification by Faith (3:21-31)

- Romans 3:21 begins with these 2 pivotal words - "*BUT NOW*" - which signals a dramatic turning point in the Epistle; it marks a change from the "bad news" of man's guilt which merits God's wrath to the "good news" of the way of salvation that God has provided through Jesus Christ.
- Beginning in R3:21 through to R8:39, we come to the 2<sup>nd</sup> section of the glorious gospel in Romans – the grace/righteousness of God. How can a sinner be right (righteous/justified) before God? Man must be justified by faith in Jesus Christ (cf 1:17). In R3:21-31, Paul develops his thoughts of salvation around three themes - justification, redemption, and propitiation (vv24-25).

### 1. The Characteristics of Justification (3:21-24)

#### *(i) Justification is Apart from the Law, 3:21*

- God has provided a way for sinful men to be made right in His sight, and that way is without keeping the requirements of the Law. This phrase "*without the law*" contrasts the Jews' / man's misconception of the way of attaining righteousness (by observing the law, or by good deeds) and the Gospel's method of righteousness. The Law cannot save but God has revealed a righteousness that will save, that is offered apart from the Law, apart from our own merits.
- This righteousness from God is "*witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*," which means, the whole Old Testament (Lk 24:27; Matt 5:17). "*The Law and the Prophets*" points to the coming Messiah, the Saviour, and Son of God, who Himself would provide the righteousness that God demands of men (Acts 4:12; Jn 1:29). God has always planned that man may be saved by grace through faith.
  - The Law. The good news of God's provision of His righteousness was foretold in types and shadows of the Levitical sacrificial system which required the shedding of blood for atonement.
  - The Prophets. In Romans 4, Paul will give the examples of 2 OT witnesses - Abraham and David - both of whom bore testimony that the righteousness of God was available to man by faith.

The righteousness Paul is describing has always been available to those who would receive it by faith, both in OT & NT times.

#### *(ii) Justification is Appropriated Through Faith, 3:22*

- Justification is received or appropriated through faith in Jesus Christ. We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. Faith means 'a commitment to, a trust in, a reliance upon' Jesus' death on the cross for our sins. In relation to righteousness, to exercise faith means abandoning all good works and casting oneself totally on Christ as God's only acceptable sacrifice for our sins. Self-effort, religious ritual, or good deeds cannot take away sin. But when we trust in Christ for salvation, we are justified before God.

- Our faith is NOT the ground of our justification (cf vv25-26). Faith in itself is not something that merits salvation, but rather it is the channel that receives the gift of salvation. A man cannot boast of his faith. Faith is not an attempt to earn salvation but is the means by which God's grace (and the righteousness of Christ) is credited to the sinner.
- The righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ, and it is for all who believe. No sinner needs to despair that he is too far gone or wicked to receive this gift of salvation. All who believe are justified by God's grace.

(iii) *Justification is Needed Because All Have Sinned, 3:23*

- Every person in the history of the world, whether past, present, or until the end of the age has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The essence of sin is to fall short of God's glory. Sin is any thought, word, or deed that falls short of God's standard of holiness and perfection. By this high standard, God is not comparing us to someone we think is further away from God than we are. We are weighed in the balance & measured against the absolute purity & perfections of God. By this standard, we have fallen woefully short!
- No matter how righteous or good we think we are, none of us can plead righteousness when we come before God (Ps 130:3). The good news is that although we all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, freely by His grace He declares righteous all who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

(iv) *Justification is a Gift Through Redemption in Christ, 3:24*

- To be justified (or justification) is a forensic or legal term that means to make a declaration. When a person goes to court and is pronounced or declared "not guilty," he is referred to as having been justified (Deut 25:1). Justification is NOT an act of God that makes us righteous but is an act of God that declares us righteous. It does not effect a change of character in the accused person; it merely pronounces or declares the person to be righteous. Justification is not only to make a declaration, but having declared one righteous or not guilty, to treat him based on that declaration. It is pronouncing one to be just, and treating him accordingly, on the ground that the demands of the law have been satisfied. In relation to man's standing, God is willing to look at your/my sinful life and make a declaration – "NOT GUILTY!" If you believe in Jesus Christ, then you are declared righteous before God.
- God justifies sinners "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." "Redemption" or "to redeem" means to buy something back by the payment of a price. It points to the release of a slave upon payment of the price. God sets the sinful person free because a price or ransom was paid for sin – the blood of Christ. In the OT, the chief picture of redemption was Israel's being freed from slavery in Egypt. To avoid the deaths of their firstborn sons, the Israelites had to kill a lamb and smear its blood on the doorposts and lintel of their houses. The

destroyer or 'death angel' saw the blood and passed over those homes. Jesus is our Passover lamb, slain to redeem us from our slavery to sin (John 1:29). Through His death, Jesus paid the price or ransom that God required (Mark 10:45). Intrinsic in the word "redemption" is the idea of value – ie. we were worth the price paid. John 3:16-17 beautifully sums up the NT's redemption message. God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus to redeem everyone who puts his faith in Him. God has never desired condemnation; He's always longed to redeem us and to reconcile the world to Himself.

- We are justified "freely" - without cost to us. It is freely given by God, and it is freely received by us through faith. Jesus paid what we should have paid, so that we go free at His great expense. Thus, justification is completely free for us, but it was costly to Jesus who redeemed us with His blood. Salvation is an act of God's grace; man contributes nothing to it. Being justified is an act of God Who takes the initiative and provides the means through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. The sinner who believes in Christ receives God's gift of righteousness, which then enables God to pronounce him righteous.

2. The Ground of Justification (3:25-26)

- To provide for our salvation, God "set forth" or presented Christ to be a "propitiation" for our sin. Propitiation is a very rich word; it is an image taken from the world of religion. This word "propitiation" in v25 is translated as "atonement" or "atoning sacrifice" in other bible versions. It has the idea of appeasing God's wrath through a sacrifice. This English word "propitiation" appears only 3 times in the KJV (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).
- The Greek word for "propitiation" is "*hilastērion*" - a word that is used only 2 times in the NT (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5). In the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the OT in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), the word "*hilastērion*" appears 16X. And all 16X, it is translated as "mercy seat." It is used to describe a piece of furniture in the Tabernacle – the mercy seat.
- The Mercy Seat in the Old Testament. The mercy seat, first introduced in Exodus 25:17-22, describes the cover, or lid, that was made for the Ark of the Covenant. It is the same width and length as the Ark, and it was made of pure gold. And on top of the mercy seat were a pair of cherubim. The Hebrew word used for this lid is "*kappōret*." The KJV, ESV, NASB (1977 & 1985), translate this word as "a mercy seat." Others, like the NIV & latest edition of NASB, translate it as "an atonement cover."
  - God told Moses that the Mercy Seat would be the place where He would meet with Moses, passing on His laws for Israel (Exo 25:22). It was here that Moses communed with God. It was here that God revealed certain commandments unto Moses. Moses was the only man privileged to come before God at an appointed time without sacrifice or blood in hand (Ex 33:11).